

Department of Human Services

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Articles in Today's Clips Thursday, April 19, 2007

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Foster care heads for trial DETROIT

Advocate criticizes Michigan's system

April 19, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A federal lawsuit on behalf of Michigan's 19,000 foster children that could cost Michigan millions of dollars will proceed to trial next year, U.S. District Judge Nancy Edmunds ruled.

In an opinion filed Tuesday and released Wednesday in Detroit, Edmunds denied the state's request to dismiss the class action filed by Children's Rights, a New York-based advocate.

The organization argues that systemic failings in Michigan's foster care system pose a risk of imminent harm to thousands of kids.

The group says, for example, that too many children age out of foster care without being adopted, and the state places 40% of its foster children with relatives who are not licensed to provide the care.

In its motion to dismiss, the state argued that, if the children listed as complainants in the lawsuit have problems with how the state manages their care, they should bring that to the attention of juvenile court judges overseeing their cases. The state also argued that the federal court should not interfere with ongoing proceedings in Michigan's juvenile courts.

In her 17-page opinion, Edmunds said the state was mistaken on several points and that "the injunctive relief plaintiff children seek here is directed to Michigan's executive branch, not its courts."

Negotiations between Children's Rights and the state Department of Human Services broke down last week.

"This ruling means that Michigan's children will have their long-overdue day in court," said Susan Lambiase, associate director of Children's Rights.

A trial on the federal lawsuit is scheduled for June 3, 2008.

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April 18, 2007

Judge rejects state's request for dismissal of foster care lawsuit

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

U.S. District Court Judge Nancy G. Edmunds late Tuesday rejected Michigan's attempt to dismiss a class action lawsuit that seeks to reform the state's foster care system.

The suit was filed in August by New York-based Children's Rights, on behalf of 19,000 foster children. It alleges the system suffers from a severe shortage of resources and services, which limits care for abused and neglected children.

Settlement negotiations between Michigan and Children's Rights ended last week because state officials said resources are uncertain in Michigan's current budget crisis.

Children's Rights' attorneys said discovery in the lawsuit will begin immediately. A trial is expected in June 2008.

"We're seeking an overhaul of the system to provide services to foster children, keep them safe and gets them out of foster care as quickly as possible," said Susan Lambiase, Children's Rights associate director. "None of those things are happening now."

You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024 or kkozlowski@detnews.com.

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Police: Child in Van Buren foster home dies of trauma

Washtenaw medical examiner: 3-year-old's death a homicide

Wednesday, April 18, 2007

From The Associated Press

VAN BUREN TOWNSHIP - A 3-year-old boy has died of trauma at a state-licensed foster home, officials said.

James Earl Bradley Jr., of Detroit, was the third child in eight months to die in a Wayne County foster home. He suffered seizures and a possible head injury at a home in Van Buren Township on April 8.

A Detroit newspaper reported today that the Washtenaw County Office of the Medical Examiner listed a head injury as the cause of death and has ruled the death a homicide.

The child remained on life support at Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor until he died Friday, township Police Detective Bob Greene said Monday.

Greene said doctors think James might have been shaken, received a blunt-force injury to the head or both.

"We know that something happened to him, but we don't know what yet," Greene said.

The foster parents, identified through court records as Christine Woodward and Lasana Karva, were questioned after Woodward reported that she and her 15-year-old daughter found James in distress, officials said.

Woodward was licensed to have as many as four children in day care and two foster children at a time, state records say. The state summarily suspended Woodward's day-care license and the couple's foster-care provider license, the Department of Human Services said in a news release.

Two other young foster children have been killed in licensed foster homes in recent months. Isaac Lethbridge, 2, of Westland, was fatally beaten in a Detroit foster home on Aug. 16. His foster mother is charged with involuntary manslaughter and child abuse.

Allison Newman, also 2, died Sept. 22 after she was injured in the Canton Township home of her foster mother, who is jailed on charges of first-degree murder and child abuse.

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The View

Child's death a homicide

Daycare license has been suspended

By Austen Smith
, Editor

Van Buren Township police continue to investigate the April 8 death of a 3-year-old foster child, staying in the care of a family who operated a daycare center.

James Earl Bradley was found unresponsive lying on the master bedroom floor of the home, located in the 42000 block of Sadie Lane, after a 911 call was made reporting that the boy was having seizures.

The boy was transported to Annapolis Hospital, according to Capt. Greg Laurain of Van Buren police, but emergency responders were told that he needed to be transported Mott's Children Hospital at University of Michigan, where he was later pronounced dead on April 13. He was on life support throughout that time.

Doctors at Mott reported that injuries on Bradley were consistent with closed head trauma, as if the boy had been struck or shaken.

On Tuesday, those reports were confirmed as the cause of death was officially listed as an injury to the head. Bradley's death now has been ruled a homicide, according to Donna Tokarczyk, administrative assistant at Washtenaw County Medical Examiner's office.

Foster parents Christine Woodward and Lasana Karva, both of Van Buren Township, were questioned by police the night of the incident. Woodward said that she had the flu and was downstairs, the couple's 10-year-old son was upstairs in master bedroom with Bradley at the time of the incident.

"(Woodward) stated that she was not around when the incident occurred," Laurain said. "She said her son was upstairs playing with the baby when he came down and said (Bradley) was having seizures."

On Friday, the Michigan Department of Human Services summarily suspended the license for the daycare operated by Woodward.

The suspension was the result of a recent complaint against the daycare facility, according to a press release. The April 11 complaint investigation found violations of the Child Care Organizations Act and administrative rules regarding caregiver and child care home family and indoor space.

Emergency action was taken to protect the health, welfare and safety of children under Woodward's care.

Maureen Sorbet, from the human services' department, said they are not releasing any more information about the complaint or the license suspension.

"(The daycare) is still under active investigation," Sorbet said.

She would not comment about any connection between the complaint, and the death of Bradley.

The suspension order prohibits Woodward from operating a family day care home at her current address, or any other address or location in the state.

Woodward also is required to inform all of the parents of children in her care that her certificate of registration has been suspended and that she can no longer provide day care. Woodward has held a certificate of registration to operate a family day care home since October 2, 2006., according to the press release. The certificate of registration was for six children.

For more information or to report possible child abuse, visit the DHS Web site www.michigan.gov/dhs.

Anyone with information regarding this case, is urged to call Van Buren police at 699-8930.

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Article published Apr 19, 2007

EDITORIAL

Opening doors to college could aid ex-foster youths

The foster care system has a daunting task in providing a home environment for children who, for whatever reason, cannot live with their biological families.

But an even bigger challenge often awaits those foster children who, upon reaching age 18, no longer have the support of the foster care system. Many who "age out" of the system are ill-prepared to face adulthood head-on. Finding a job and housing, as well as learning to manage money, are just a few of the issues they face in becoming independent, not to mention the need for emotional support.

Wanda Miller of Battle Creek in 2005 began "A Home for Me," a 32-week program that helps foster kids transition to an independent life. The program provides classes for teens ages 14 to 18.

But what about those children in foster care who want to continue their education beyond high school? What opportunities are available to them to obtain a college degree and pursue a college degree?

Those questions will be at the heart of a summit being held today at Starr Commonwealth in Albion. Speakers will include Michigan Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow and Michigan Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan, who co-chaired a 45-member task force in 2006 to develop an action plan to address the need of young people who age out of foster care.

According to DHS, approximately 500 youths reached 18 last year and left Michigan foster care. Both national and state research indicates they are more likely to encounter poverty, homelessness and unemployment than their non-foster care peers. According to a 2006 Wayne State University study, only 25 percent of former foster youths reported attending college or receiving advanced training since leave the foster care system, compared to the national average of 67 percent of young adults ages 18-24.

What can be done to open the doors of higher education to those young people leaving foster care? A DHS Foster Youth Advisory Board in 2005 suggested free tuition at any state college or community college for them. That resulted in a set of recommendations being developed the following year to help former foster youths obtain financial aid and other higher education resources.

We recognize now is not the time to expect the state to provide greater resources under an already strained budget, but we hope today's summit at Starr can come up with some viable steps that can be taken to ensure that young people who have aged out of foster care have greater access either to college or training programs that can help give them the skills to become self-supporting. Most already have overcome tremendous hurdles in their young lives, and helping them gain an education could help set the stage for their successful transition to adulthood.



School chief bristles over city-mailed flier

Wednesday, April 18, 2007

By Dave Murray

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Superintendent Bernard Taylor said he is accustomed to the Grand Rapids Public Schools having detractors -- he just doesn't think city government should be one of them.

Taylor fired off a letter to Mayor George Heartwell, complaining that a flier mailed to city homes uses statistics that are misleading -- and in some cases wrong -- putting his students in a bad light.

But city staff who prepared the flier -- a pitch for money for the Grand Rapids Children's Fund -- say they got the statistics from the schools, and hope the district will support the program.

The flier, mailed with recent water bills, asks residents to donate all or part of their city income tax refund to the Children's Fund, which would help cover a variety of city-run youth programs.

Lynn Heemstra, administrator of Grand Rapids' Office of Children, Youth & Families, said money raised is intended for after-school activities, tutoring, recreational programs, the mayor's Youth Council and playground equipment.

The flier states that 71 percent of children in first through sixth grades cannot read at their grade level, and that more than 20 percent of the city's children live in poverty.

It does not state whether the statistics are just for Grand Rapids Public Schools students, or whether it includes those in charter and parochial schools.

Taylor said a recent internal reading test indicated 71 percent of the students in those grades were below grade level, but said students in 11 buildings weren't tested.

Instead, he pointed to MEAP tests that show only 35.5 percent of students in third through eighth grades were not meeting standards.

He said about 75 percent of the public school students qualify for free and reduced-price lunches, an indicator of poverty -- far higher than the 20 percent listed.

The flier also states that 300 children are in emergency shelters on any given night, and that there were more than 9,000 reports of suspected child abuse or neglect in Kent County last year.

"I bring this to your attention because, as I'm sure you'll agree, it's important to provide accurate information," Taylor wrote in the letter. "Inaccurate information reporting can have a negative effect on an organization."

Taylor raised the issue at Monday's school board meeting. Heartwell said he was unaware of a problem until Taylor's office faxed him the letter Monday.

"I do feel badly if we got something wrong," he said. "We were trying to support the schools."

But Heemstra said she obtained the information from the district's Research and Evaluation Department.

"It wasn't intended to be an indictment of the Grand Rapids Public Schools, but to have information to reflect the state of our city's children," Heemstra said. "We're just trying to say, 'We have some problems and need some help.'"

Heemstra said this is the first time the city's tax returns will have a checkoff box asking for the donation, an idea backed by city commissioners Elias Lumpkins and Rosalyn Bliss. Residents have until April 30 to turn in their tax forms, and also can write a check to the fund.

Last year, the city added a fund to purchase flags for veterans' graves on Memorial Day and generated \$9,573.

Send e-mail to the author: dmurray@grpress.com

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Article published Apr 19, 2007

Appeal date set in father-son rape case

By Lisa Roose-Church
DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

The Michigan Court of Appeals will hear arguments May 2 to determine whether a Livingston County assistant prosecutor should be disqualified from trying a father-son rape case.

The Livingston County prosecutor's office appealed Circuit Judge David Reader's disqualification of Assistant Prosecutor Daniel Rose from trying the case of a Tyrone Township man accused of molesting his then-12-year-old son.

Reader disqualified Rose, at the defense's request, from trying the case because he interviewed the accuser, which the defense said meant Rose could be called as a witness at trial.

The now 13-year-old boy alleges his father, Daniel Sanford Tesen, 35, raped him in April 2006. The teen's statements were obtained by Rose in an interview at LACASA, a process that is witnessed by a team of several people that evaluates child victims.

Defense attorney Mack Spickard filed a motion asking Reader to disqualify Rose, claiming Rose essentially acted as a police officer, not a prosecutor, when he interviewed the teen.

Rose has maintained there is no reason to call him as a witness because there were five witnesses at the interview. Those witnesses testified in a hearing in Livingston County District Court that they each took notes about the teen's allegations, but some admitted that they were not present for the entire interview, which lasted more than an hour.

Spickard countered that those five witnesses cannot testify to Rose's rationale behind certain questions he posed to the teen because they would not know what thoughts were in Rose's mind.

The alleged incidents came to light in May after the teen, who previously lived in Las Vegas with his mother, who does not believe her son's claims, passed a note to a neighbor. The note claimed he was being abused by his father. The neighbor's parents called 911.

Tesen is charged with one count each of distributing obscene matter to a child, third-degree child abuse and truancy for failing to send his son to school. He also faces 14 counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, which are punishable by up to life in prison. His trial has been put on hold pending the appeals.

Contact Lisa Roose-Church at (517) 552-2846, or at lrchurch@gannett.com.

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Article published Apr 19, 2007

Town Hall meeting to focus on safety of children

A Town Hall meeting, "A Child Is Safer When a Parent Is Alert," will be 7-8:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 2, at the Oakland County Board of Commissioners Auditorium, 1200 N. Telegraph, Pontiac. Parking and admission are free for the event, which is open to the public.

Keynote speaker is Faye Hyslop, of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Panelists include: Beth Morrison, president and CEO of HAVEN; Detective Sgt. Joe Brian of the Oakland County Sheriff's office; Cindy Bridgman, M.S.W., director of intervention and treatment, Child Abuse and Neglect Council; Matt Roth, assistant prosecutor, Oakland County Prosecutor's office; and Diana Pyles, county program manager, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

Those attending are asked to reply to Sheryl Mitchell at (248) 858-4078 or mitchells@oakgov.com.

Child safety to

be stressed in Monday workshop

By MIKE FORNES

Tribune Staff Writer

CHEBOYGAN - A panel of local experts will provide information for parents regarding the health and safety of area children at an upcoming workshop.

The Cheboygan County Child Advocacy Council presents "Protecting our Children" at 7 p.m. Monday in the Cheboygan Memorial Health Center conference room. There is no charge to attend.

The panel will feature six presenters representing various facets of the community that potentially have contact with children outside the framework of the school day. The speakers and their topics include:

€Judge Robert Butts - The role of the Probate Court.

€Cheboygan County Sheriff Dale Clarmont - The role of law enforcement.

€Attorney Dan Martin - Legal rights and responsibilities.

€Youth Center Director Debra Turnbull - The role of parents.

€Dr. Jennifer Tryban - Recognizing signs.

€Michigan Department of Human Services representative - Defining the problem.

One panelist describes the evening as essential for parents interested in protecting their children from modern-day dangers.

"I like to be able to have this information to help the parents," said Turnbull, an organizer of the program. "It's wonderful information for them to have to help their children. When you can pull all these people together and collectively address these situations, it helps to focus the direction on strengthening the family unit. This is a whole focus on preventing problems."

The evening's sponsor, the Michigan Children's Trust Fund, supports efforts that develop a community response to child abuse and neglect through public awareness, information dissemination, training and technical assistance, research and the funding of local community programs and services.

Turnbull said that refreshments will be served and that handouts from the various presenters will be available.

For more information, contact Turnbull at 627-6015 or 597-0185.

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Michigan 4C honors, informs about quality child care

Michigan 4C Association is working with child care providers, parents and child care advocates across the state to honor the contribution that quality child care makes to families of working parents and the Michigan economy as a whole.

Regulated child care providers -- in homes or child care centers -- can take care of about 679,000 children through age 12. Long-term studies have shown how money spent on quality early childhood care comes back in savings as children grow up.

A Michigan High Scope Research Foundation study found for each dollar invested in high quality early childhood care and education, \$17 is saved on welfare, prison, and remedial education costs, according to the Lansing-based Michigan 4C Association. In comparison to quality child care investment returns, workforce absenteeism caused by poor quality child care costs American businesses more than \$3 billion dollars a year.

"It's a simple truth," said Mark Sullivan, executive director of the Michigan 4C Association, "when parents can't find child care, they can't work. And that's why we say, 'Michigan works when child care works.'"

Parents pay an average of \$8,219 per year for infant child care, an average of \$6,863 for a four-year-old.

The Michigan 4C Association invites all to the first annual "Child Care Day at the Capitol" on Tuesday, April 24, from 8:00 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the State Capitol Building in Lansing, Michigan. Space has been reserved inside the State Capitol for displays and exhibits that highlight the child care system and especially the organizations that support child care.

Michigan 4C agencies are also distributing materials to educate parents, employers and lawmakers about the relationship between child care and work. These include a flyer, two different handprint activity sheets for children to decorate and stickers for parents and providers to wear. The materials will also be posted on the MI4C Web site (www.mi4c.org/childcareworks.html) and other places on the Internet.

The Michigan 4C Association promotes the optimal care and development of Michigan's children and families through the 16 Regional agencies statewide that make up the Community Coordinated Child Care (4C) network. Every year the 4C network trains more than 5,200 early childhood educators and caregivers, and offers child care referrals or other early childhood supports to more than 83,000 families of young children.

The MI4C Association operates a toll-free number, 1-866-4CHILD CARE for anyone who wants information about licensed or registered child care homes and centers, or has other questions about early childhood care and education.



— THE — ANN ARBOR NEWS

Sexual assault victims share their survival stories

Event encourages candid expressions

Thursday, April 19, 2007

BY MEGAN BROWN

News Staff Reporter

In some instances, it was a boyfriend. In others, a husband. An acquaintance. A best friend. Gathered at SafeHouse Center on Wednesday, victims of sexual assault recounted stories of broken trust and resilient survival.

SafeHouse, a shelter and advocacy center for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, hosted the event called Speak Out as part of a series to mark the month of April, which is Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

"The purpose of this is to give voices to survivors who have felt voiceless up until now," said Barbara Niess, SafeHouse's executive director.

For some who found their voices, it was not always easy to articulate what happened to them.

"Last year, I was raped," said Erika McCollum, who said her assailant was a fellow student she met last year as a freshman during Welcome Week at the University of Michigan. "It took me a really long time to call it that. I used to call it the time I had sex, but I didn't want to, but I had to."

About three in 10 rapes are reported, Niess said. In Ann Arbor, approximately 30 rapes are reported each year, meaning that more than 60 might go undocumented, she said.

SafeHouse offers a variety of services for victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault, Niess said. Each year, about 5,400 people receive assistance from the center, through counseling, support, the 24-hour help line and the shelter, which has 50 beds.

Giving victims a forum to speak helps them break the silence surrounding sexual assault, said Jen Sharkey, a sexual assault counselor at SafeHouse who helped coordinate Speak Out.

Addressing the audience, Sharkey said that she first opened up at a Speak Out event hosted by U-M's Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center. After speaking there, she said, she called her mother and told her about being raped.

"I don't know if I would have ever told her if it wasn't for the opportunity (to speak)," Sharkey said.

SafeHouse's event was its first Speak Out for victims of sexual assault, Niess said. The center also hosts a similar event for victims of domestic violence.

The women who spoke described trying to heal in different ways. Some meet with fellow survivors. Some counsel other assault victims. Pam Swider, who said she was raped by a man she met while visiting Orlando, Fla., created Women For Hope, a Web site through which people can purchase jewelry for various causes, such as sexual assault and AIDS, with a portion of proceeds going to related charities.

"People need to know they're not the only ones," Swider said. "I stand here a survivor, not a victim."

Contact Megan Brown at mbrown@annarbornews.com or 734-994-6852.



Inmate facing murder charge

Thursday, April 19, 2007

By Steven Hepker

shepker@citpat.com -- 768-4923

Jackson and Isabella county prosecutors today will charge an inmate in Blackman Township with murdering his girlfriend in 2005 and contracting a hit on her daughter from his prison cell.

Gordon D. Schultz, 45, is housed at Southern Michigan Correctional Facility for up to 15 years for domestic violence against Becky Sue MacDonald in October 2005.

"He was convicted in Isabella County even though she did not testify at his trial," Jackson County Chief Assistant Prosecutor Mark Blumer said.

That's because she was killed on or about Nov. 11, 2005, and was buried in Midland County.

Authorities assumed MacDonald was dead but had no information about the body until Schultz asked another inmate to help find a contract killer early this year, Blumer said.

Press conferences were planned today to announce a charge of solicitation of murder in Jackson and a charge of open murder in Mount Pleasant.

Schultz thought MacDonald's daughter was responsible for the continued investigation into her disappearance, Blumer said.

"The inmate contacted police and they arranged an undercover detective posing as a killer for hire," he said.

The detective was convincing enough to not only arrange the hit, but also got Schultz to tell him where MacDonald was buried, Blumer said.

"They found her body within 5 feet of where he said it would be," Blumer said.

Investigators from Midland and Isabella counties recovered the body on Jan. 23. MacDonald, of Winn, was 42 and had four children. Her memorial was held March 24.

Department of Corrections records indicate Schultz is on his fifth prison sentence, dating back to 1980. He has felony convictions in Isabella, Midland and Saginaw counties.

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Article published Apr 19, 2007

Rising gas costs hit the poor

Elizabeth Huff

The Enquirer

People struggling to pay home heating bills will have fewer places to turn when the gas man wants to shut it off.

The Michigan Department of Human Service's Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program will run out of money Friday. The DHS stopped taking applications on April 11 until further notice.

"People look to us for assistance with these types of payments when there is no other alternative," said spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet. "Unfortunately, we are not able to assist them at this time."

In Calhoun County, the DHS paid \$1.8 million in emergency heating assistance to 4,744 households in fiscal year 2006. It paid \$98 million across the state that year. Both state and local figures have steadily increased during the past three years, Sorbet said.

Since the DHS stopped taking applications, the number of applicants at Community Action Agency of South Central Michigan jumped from an average of 40 per day to more than 160 per day, said Chief Executive Officer Nancy Macfarlane.

"We are seeing a huge increase at our door," she said.

She expects more will come as gas companies begin issuing shut-off notices following the winter protection period.

"The local community cannot make up this gap," Macfarlane said. "It's really not going to be pretty for people."

Rising gas prices and a debilitating injury left Tracy Burdette, 46, an unemployed single father wondering how he was going to pay the bills. Child support payments for his kids, 10-year-old twins and a 14-year-old, of \$600 a month are the family's only income.

"I've always worked for a living," he said. "This is all new to me."

He's had to juggle paying portions of his water, electricity and gas bills to keep them all operating in his Battle Creek home of 25 years.

His last gas bill was \$382. He had to pay \$225 or have it shut off on April 9.

"We've even been keeping the gas way down at 67 (degrees)," Burdette said. "We wear sweaters and sweat pants."

DHS doled out \$69 toward the cost. CAA topped off the rest of the \$225 with Battle Creek-based Semco Energy Gas Co. dollars donated through the United Way of Greater Battle Creek. He still owes the \$157 difference. CAA also paid \$132 for his electricity bill.

"They saved my gas from being shut off," he said.

But funding is tight for utilities across the board. When one pot of funds runs out, it puts greater pressure on the others, Macfarlane said.

"We will run out of money very quickly," she said. "When it's gone, it's gone."



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Accounts differ on Saline melee Student faces inciting-a-riot charge

Wednesday, April 18, 2007

BY AMALIE NASH

News Staff Reporter

Police say a Saline High School junior arranged an after-school fistfight between two students last December, leading to a large melee.

The teen's father says his son merely invited friends to their Pittsfield Township home that evening for a bonfire, where two students who had a previous dispute suddenly began fighting.

Both sides agree that the now 17-year-old did not participate in the fight.

Whether he planned it is at the center of a criminal case that charges the teen in juvenile court with inciting a riot and unlawful assembly.

The teen, who is not being named by The News because he was 16 at the time and is charged as a juvenile, will go on trial April 25.

Police reports released under the Freedom of Information Act show that the Dec. 15 fight between two boys started the day before in the locker room of Saline High School. One of the boys involved told police that the other teen grabbed his "beater shirt," got it wet and ripped it, so he challenged him to a fight.

Several students urged them not to fight at school, and the teen now facing charges told them the fight could be held at his house.

A coach at Saline High got wind of the fight, and school personnel alerted police.

When officers arrived, they found 20 to 25 cars and 40 teenagers in the road - with cars continuing to arrive and flee while police were there, police reports said. Several students told officers a "big fight" was to happen, but ended when police arrived.

In interviews with police, the junior denied arranging the fight and said he invited people over to his house before a basketball game that night.

The student is currently on probation after admitting to an assault charge in juvenile court involving a fight last Sept. 20 at another student's home behind the Dairy Queen in Saline. In that incident, police say, the youth was not involved in the original fight but punched the homeowner, whose son was among those fighting. The homeowner told police he struck back in self-defense, causing the teen to have a swollen eye and cut lip.

"In 20 years on the job, I've never seen so many people at a fight," Saline Police Officer Bridget Seames said, referring to the fight at the Dairy Queen.

The teen's father said his son jumped in when the adult assaulted a friend. He said his son was disciplined by the school district in that incident, but not the December fight.

The father questioned why his son was charged with inciting a riot while neither of the teens involved in the fight are apparently facing charges.

"This is something the police department has blown out of proportion," the father said. "I was shocked when he got charged with a felony."

Washtenaw County Deputy Chief Assistant Prosecutor Steven Hiller declined to discuss the case, but said state law allows prosecutors to levy charges of inciting a riot if someone urges others to engage in violence. A riot is defined as when five or more people are acting in concert.

Saline Schools Superintendent Beverley Geltner said students can be disciplined by the district for assaults that involve other students and occur off-campus. Citing privacy laws, school officials declined to say whether any of the students involved in either fight were disciplined.

Both police and school officials said they also heard rumors of a fight club at the high school, but could not find any evidence of its existence. Pittsfield Police Detective Lt. Steve Heller said officers heard that a video of a fight involving Saline students was posted on YouTube, but police didn't find it.

Geltner and Assistant High School Principal Eric Diroff said no new problems have occurred this semester.

Inciting a riot is a felony punishable by up to 10 years in prison, but because the teen was a juvenile, sentencing options would be different if he is convicted - ranging from intensive probation to detention, officials said.

Amalie Nash can be reached at anash@annarbornews.com or 734-994-6832.

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Juvenile arrested in unarmed-robbery case

Thursday, April 19, 2007

Kalamazoo Gazette Staff Reports

A juvenile has been arrested and two others were being sought after a reported unarmed robbery of a woman Wednesday in Kalamazoo. Kalamazoo Public Safety officers responded at 6:15 p.m. to a report of a woman having been assaulted in the area of Oak and West Cedar streets. Three juveniles had assaulted the woman and tried to steal her backpack but fled the area without getting it, police said. One of the suspects was arrested, charged with unarmed robbery and held in the Kalamazoo County Juvenile Home.

Anyone with information about the incident should call Kalamazoo Public Safety at 337-8994 or Silent Observer at 343-2100.



Michigan unemployment rate for March at 6.5 percent

4/18/2007, 2:03 p.m. ET

By KATHY BARKS HOFFMAN
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Michigan's unemployment rate dropped in March for the third month in a row to 6.5 percent, the lowest since October 2005.

It remains significantly higher than the national rate, which declined to 4.4 percent in March. But the state rate is down from February's rate of 6.6 percent and from the March 2006 rate of 6.8 percent.

"Although little changed over the month, Michigan's unemployment rate has been trending downward in early 2007," said Rick Waclawek, director of the state Department of Labor and Economic Growth's Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives.

Waclawek said in a news release that the rate is dropping because the state's labor force has declined by 10,000 people in the past year, while March's total employment count of 4.75 million workers was 15,000 above the 2006 average.

The state's quarterly unemployment rate for January through March was 6.7 percent, a decline from the fourth quarter 2006 rate of 7.1 percent.

During March, the state added 3,000 manufacturing jobs and the same number of government workers. Education and health services added 2,000 positions.

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Monthly Unemployment Rate Declines

MIRS, April 18, 2007

The state's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in March dropped slightly by 0.1 percent, to 6.5 percent from February's 6.6 percent, according to data released today by the Department of Labor & Economic Growth (DLEG).

Total employment rose moderately by 9,000 and unemployment declined by 7,000, leaving the state's labor force relatively unchanged in the month of March..

Michigan's March 2007 jobless rate declined by 0.3 percent from the state's March 2006 rate of 6.8 percent. In the same period, the national jobless rate decreased by three-tenths of a percentage point, as well.

"Although little changed over the month, Michigan's unemployment rate has been trending downward in early 2007," said Rick **WACLAWEK**, director of DLEG's Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives. "The rate decline is in part due to a minor reduction in the state's workforce in conjunction with an increase in employment since December."

Michigan's jobless rate in March declined for the third consecutive month and was the lowest monthly rate since October 2005.

State Pushing to Get Residents Off Welfare

April 18, 2007 07:19 AM EDT



The state begins a new push to get tens of thousands of people off welfare. More than 80,000 people depend on money from the state to make ends meet. Most are single parents with children. This month, they received a letter explaining what they must do if they want to keep getting assistance.

Don Mussen, Department of Human Services: "This is a push to not just get people off welfare, but to help families to self-sufficiency."

And that road to self-sufficiency begins with a 50-question internet survey. Caseworkers will use the information to help each client map out a plan.

Don Mussen: "What they need to get a job that they'll be able to support their family and that they'll be able to keep."

Once the plan is set, the recipient must follow it, and if they don't, they'll pay. The first and second times they fail to comply, they lose cash benefits for three months, and if they fail to follow their plan a third time, they lose an entire year of benefits. This concerns those who represent welfare recipients, who say developing a plan won't be easy.

Lori Pourzan, Legal Services of SC Michigan: "The biggest problem is going to be honesty. It's very hard to an individual to state what their limitations are."

But the state says the new welfare rules will strengthen Michigan families, and stronger families mean more workers and a better economy. The new welfare requirements took effect April first. Letters were mailed out to recipients at the end of March.